Glutathione

Function:

Glutathione is implicated in many cellular functions including antioxidant protection and detoxification. It is also essential for the maintenance of cell membrane integrity in red blood cells. Intracellular glutathione concentrations are principally derived by intracellular synthesis, as few cells directly uptake glutathione from the surrounding extracellular fluid. The high concentration of glutathione in virtually all cells clearly indicates its importance in metabolic and oxidative detoxification processes. Glutathione may be considered the preeminent antioxidant.

Deficiency Symptoms:

A wide range of human conditions such as aging, cancer, atherosclerosis, arthritis, viral infections, AIDS, cardiovascular, neurodegenerative diseases and pulmonary diseases may be produced, or made worse, by “free radicals”. Their treatment or prevention often includes antioxidants such as vitamin C, vitamin E, carotenoids and selenium. Glutathione is an essential component of the antioxidant defense system: producing a "sparing effect" for both tocopherol and ascorbate by reducing the oxidized forms, and by eliminating hydrogen peroxide by reacting with glutathione peroxidase. Cellular glutathione functions to decrease the formation of oxidized LDL, implicated in the development of atherosclerosis. T-lymphocytes become deficient in glutathione in the progression of AIDS which impairs immune function. Glutathione is also required for the synthesis of some prostaglandins from n-3 and n-6 polyunsaturated fatty acids which are important in the inflammatory response. Patients with adult respiratory distress syndrome are favorably affected by treatments that increase cellular glutathione.

Repletion Information:

Glutathione is poorly absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract and foods rich in glutathione do not appear to contribute to increases in intracellular glutathione levels. Cysteine appears to be the limiting amino acid in the intracellular synthesis of glutathione and supplementation with up to 2000 mg daily of N-Acetyl-L-Cysteine appear safe. Supplementation with cysteine is not recommended as it may be poorly tolerated by many patients. In addition, it may be rapidly oxidized to L-cystine, a less usable form for the synthesis of glutathione. Foods rich in cyteine are generally high protein foods such as meats, yogurt, wheat germ and eggs.